

Sparks

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WHY IS LIFE SO DIFFICULT?

Making peace with our battle

In this week's portion, Jacob asks for peace and relaxation, but G-d had another plan.

“Jacob settled (down) in the land of his father's dwellings, in the Land of Caanan.” — Genesis 37:2

The foremost commentator, Rashi, explains: Jacob wanted to settle down in tranquility but then the ordeal of his son Joseph (sale into slavery) fell upon him. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility but G-d says 'Is it not enough for the righteous what has been prepared for them (reward) in the World to Come that they need to seek tranquility also in this world!'"

Some people turn to G-d and religion, hoping to find refuge from all the turbulence of life, from doubt, from inner conflicts and mental turmoil. They want instant inner peace, spiritual contentment, and tranquility for their troubled souls.

According to Kabbalah, that is not the purpose of life on earth. In fact, it is just the opposite. We have been dropped right in the middle of the stormy seas of daily living. We are confronted with the problems from within and without. And we are commanded to fix them and ourselves. The theme of life is precisely about embracing the difficulties of life and rising to the challenges.

Why did G-d create such an imperfect world filled with imperfect people?

The very first verse of the Book of Genesis tells us: "In the beginning G-d created heaven and earth, and earth was in a state of chaos." This sounds like G-d did a pretty crummy job. The minute He creates the world, it's already in a state of chaos.

But the truth is that G-d did a perfect job. What's perfect about this world is the chaos! It's the perfect place for growth. It's the perfect place for challenge. It's the perfect setting for triumph. It is the perfect stage for an exciting drama about personal transformation.

This world is meant to be difficult, and your life on earth is meant to be a struggle, filled with adventure, challenge, and victory. This is your divine mission if you are willing to accept it. And if you accept it, you will have the power to succeed.

ARE YOU READY TO PLAY YOUR PART?

The Torah, in the Book of Genesis, makes an outlandish claim. It says that G-d created us in His image. What's that supposed to mean? G-d created you and me in His image in the same way that an author creates all his characters in his image. Each character in the story expresses a different aspect of the author. Even the interaction between the characters is in some way an unfolding of the truth of the author.

Every good story, however, has problems and problem characters who create all the tension. Why? Because the problem and the antagonist play the essential role of bringing out the inner selves of all the other characters. That's an important factor. The difficulties help the characters in the story reveal their deepest selves — rise to their challenges and demonstrate extraordinary courage, tremendous fortitude, and new commitment.

The antagonist in every story is actually providing the opportunities for the other characters to make great choices that embody great goodness. He is actually serving the best interest of all the other characters, and, of course, the author (whom the story is really all about).

The Talmud teaches that the *Shekhinah*, the Divine Presence, which is the feminine manifestation of G-d, desires to live in this world. How? Through you and me when we choose to follow the commandments and directly serve G-d, the Author.

Often, when people pick up the Bible and read about serving G-d, they feel put off, feeling: Why would I want to *serve* G-d? Be *servile*? It seems demeaning. But if you're a character in the story, how could you not want to serve the author? You are an expression of the author and he is our higher shared Self.

What does it mean to serve the author?

It means that I am a vehicle for the expression of the author in this story. I can't wait to serve the author, because the more I serve the author, the more the author's presence, my Higher Self, permeates my very being, and the more I discover that I am actually a part of the author. It's not about obedience. It's about self-expression. It's about who you are, why you are, who G-d is, and why He creates. All the problems in life are really opportunities to be more; to play your part as a part of G-d.

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